

I. DESCRIPTION OF CAROLINA BEACH STATE PARK

LOCATION AND ACCESS

Carolina Beach State Park is located off US 421 in New Hanover County on Dow Road, 10 miles south of Wilmington. (Figure I-1) From Interstate 40, take College Road (State Route 132) south through Wilmington to U.S. 421. Continue south on US 421 and cross the Snow's Cut Bridge over the Intracoastal Waterway. At the second stop light, turn right on Dow Road and follow the signs to the park, a short distance on the right

Carolina Beach State Park may also be reached from Brunswick County via the Southport-Fort Fisher ferry, which crosses the Cape Fear River. From Southport, a thirty-minute ferry ride takes you to the end of Federal Point. Take U.S. 421 north about six miles and turn left onto Dow Road and follow the signs to the park.

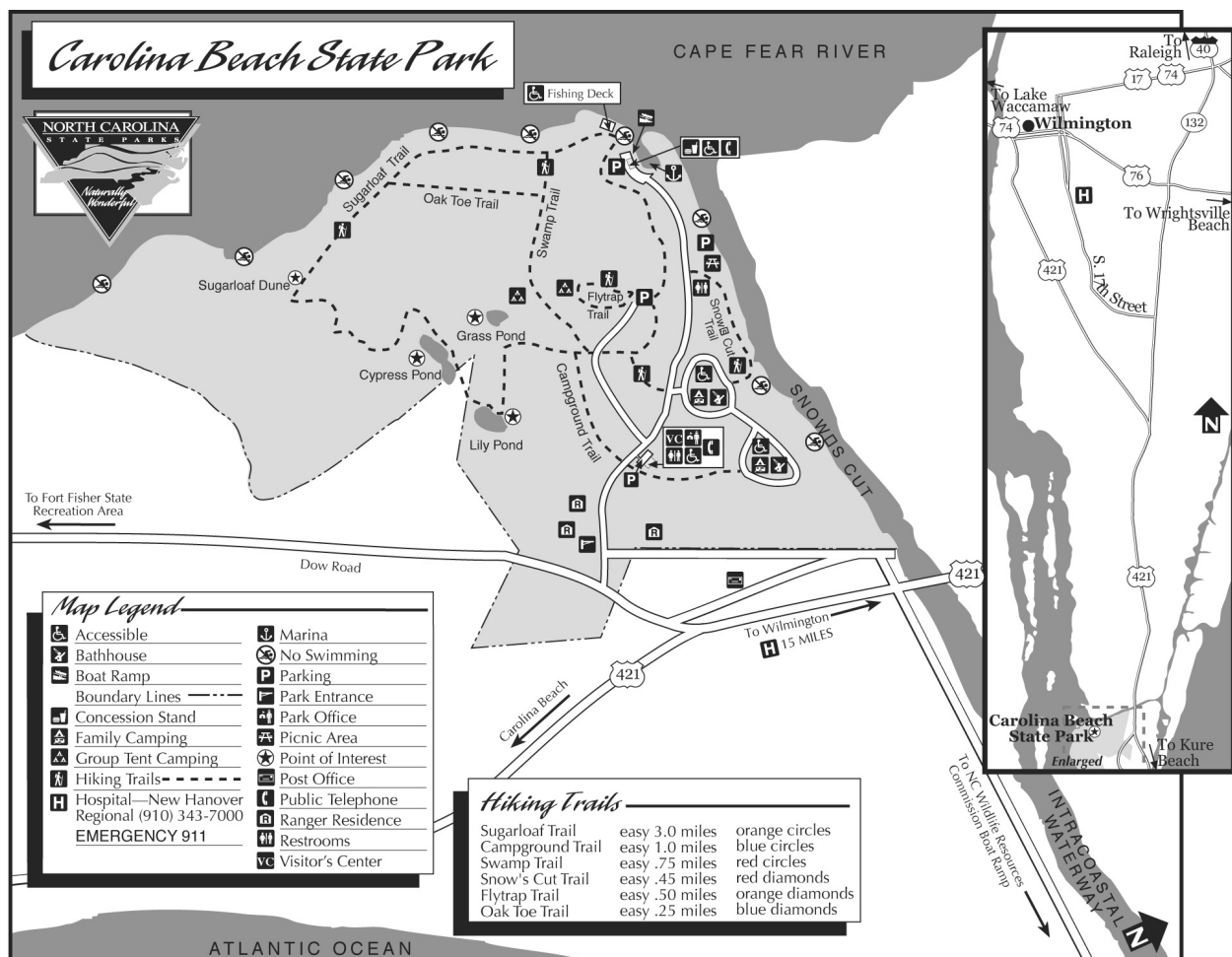


Figure I-1. Carolina Beach State Park

The park's mailing address, telephone numbers and email address are:

Carolina Beach State Park
P.O. Box 475
Carolina Beach, N.C. 28428

Office (910) 458-8206
Marina (910) 458-7770

Carolina.Beach@ncmail.net

PARK LAND

Carolina Beach State Park consists of 686 acres (including 266 leased acres) that lie along Snow's Cut and the Cape Fear River (Figure I-1). The major attraction is the park's unique environment that includes several coastal ecosystems. Forests dominated by longleaf pine, turkey oak and live oak occupy the dry, coarse soil of a series of relict sand dunes. Between the dunes are dense shrub swamps, called pocosins, populated by pond and loblolly pines, sweet bay, yaupon and evergreen shrubs. Brackish marshes consisting primarily of cordgrasses and sedges can be found beyond the relict dunes adjacent to the river.

Eight limesink ponds are located within the park. Three of these, each vegetated by a unique plant community, are found in the sand dunes. A dwarf cypress swamp forest dominates Cypress Pond,



the most unusual limesink pond in the park. Lily Pond is occupied by the broad, oval leaves and beautiful, white flowers of water lilies, which cover its waters in early summer. Grass Pond, which dries out almost every year, is filled with a variety of aquatic sedges. Carnivorous plants thrive in the boggy soil around its edge and in the park's acidic, mineral-poor soil.

Several interesting carnivorous plants thrive at Carolina Beach State Park by trapping and digesting insects. Among these carnivorous plants are pitcher plants, bladderworts, sundews and butterworts, but the most familiar—and the most spectacular—is the Venus' flytrap.

Figure I-2. Venus' Flytrap

Carolina Beach State Park is a great place for bird watching. Brown pelicans thrive in the coastal environment, and warblers, finches and woodpeckers fill the woods. In summer, painted buntings, yellowthroats and prairie warblers can be seen in the forest while ospreys populate Snow's Cut. Besides providing habitat for resident land birds during the winter and summer, Carolina Beach State Park also is located along an important migration corridor and attracts many birds during their migrations.

The small ponds in the park are home to various frog species, including the rare gopher frog. Carolina anoles, five-lined skinks and six-lined racerunners are also found. Occasionally, an alligator will wander into the marina. White-tailed deer and raccoons are abundant, and gray squirrels, cottontails and other animals common to the southern coastal plain may be seen along with an occasional opossum, fox squirrel, gray fox or river otter.

VISITOR FACILITIES

Carolina Beach State Park offers a variety of recreational opportunities (Figure I-1). The waters of the Cape Fear River, the estuarine waters of Masonboro Sound and the salt waters of the Atlantic Ocean are all only moments away. A marina with two launching ramps and 42 boat slips is located in the park at the junction of Snow's Cut and the Cape Fear River. Fuel, snacks and restrooms are available in the marina building, and a pumpout station and showers are provided for slip renters. Within the park, visitors may fish from the riverbank or the wheelchair-accessible fishing deck.



Figure I-3. Launching Ramps



Figure I-4. Marina

The park's family campground is located in a wooded area near Snow's Cut. Pine and oak provide shade for 83 campsites, including two wheelchair-accessible sites. Each site is equipped with a picnic table and grill. Drinking water and restrooms with hot showers are located nearby. Hookups are not provided for recreational vehicles, but a dump station is available for a fee.

Two camping areas for organized groups are located along Swamp Trail and are available by advance reservation only. One site accommodates up to 20 people; the other accommodates up to 35 people. These areas include picnic tables, fire circles and pit toilets.



Rangers hold regularly scheduled educational and interpretive programs. In addition to the multiple educational programs offered, Carolina Beach State Park's visitor's center features environmental education exhibits. Displays allow visitors to look deeper into the diversity of carnivorous plants in the park, and hands-on exhibits allow for interactive learning about these intriguing species.

Figure I-5. Visitor's Center

The park's picnic area is located near the bank of Snow's Cut, between the campground and marina. Picnic tables and grills are located under the shade of large oak trees. Water, restrooms and parking are conveniently located nearby.



More than six miles of trails wind through a variety of distinct habitats. Relatively flat and easy to walk, the trails offer an opportunity to observe the diversity of plant and animal life in the park.

Figure I-6. Boardwalk Trail

HISTORY OF THE PARK AREA

Early Settlement of the Area

Prior to European settlement, the Cape Fear Indians, of the Siouan language group, lived in and around the area that is now Carolina Beach State Park, farming, fishing and hunting. Mainly occupying the land along the Cape Fear River and its tributaries, the small tribe grew hostile to early settlers who had not treated them well and, in 1715, participated in an uprising against European settlers in the area. Fighting reduced their numbers, and in 1725, the Cape Fear Indians were defeated by a military expedition lead by “King” Roger Moore, founder of Orton Plantation in Brunswick County, and the Indians left the area. Artifacts of the native culture, including pottery fragments, arrowheads and mounds of oyster shells, have been found in the area.

Early attempts at colonization in the area were unsuccessful, mainly due to conflicts with the Cape Fear Indians. Pirating, common in the area during colonial times, also contributed to the struggles of early settlers. In 1726, a permanent settlement, the Town of Brunswick, was established along the lower Cape Fear in what is now Brunswick County. Brunswick, home to two royal governors, was an early political center and major pre-Revolutionary port. It declined in importance as Wilmington grew and the royal governor was relocated to New Bern in 1770. By 1776, when British redcoats landed, few people remained. Some reports indicate that much of Brunswick was burned at this time. The ruins and land at Brunswick became a part of Orton Plantation in 1842. In the late 1950s and 1960s, archaeological work was undertaken at Brunswick, and the area is now a state historic site (N.C. Office of Archives and History, 2004).

About 1730, further upstream on the east side of the Cape Fear River, the port of Wilmington was settled and rapidly outgrew the Town of Brunswick. Wilmington became a bustling port, particularly important for its exports of naval stores – tar, pitch and turpentine products derived from the resin of the longleaf pine. These products, critical for building and maintaining sailing vessels of that period, were sometimes called “sticky gold” (Sharpe, 1954). The English crown designated the newly settled Cape Fear River as one of five official ports of entry, and the port became an important area for commerce. Agricultural and timber products, naval stores, shipping and trade formed the basis of the area’s economy.

Sugarloaf, a 50-foot high relict sand dune near the bank of the Cape Fear River, is part of an east–west ridge of sand dunes formed thousands of years ago during the late Pleistocene epoch. Gradually trees and grasses stabilized the dunes by holding the sands in place. The massive sand

dunes reminded early settlers from Barbados of the mounds of sugar at their home port, and the name “Sugarloaf” stuck. Today, Sugarloaf is a part of Carolina Beach State Park. Sugarloaf appeared on navigational charts as early as 1738 and was an important landmark for river pilots.

Civil War

Sugarloaf was also of strategic significance during the Civil War when, as part of the Confederacy's defense of the Port of Wilmington, about 5,000 troops camped on or near Sugarloaf during the siege of Fort Fisher. Fort Fisher, located a few miles south of Carolina Beach State Park, was built to protect Wilmington from Federal forces prior to the Civil War. Its capture on January 15, 1865 severed the supply line of the Confederacy and the Civil War ended soon thereafter. An engagement between Union and Confederate forces took place at Sugar Loaf, a former community at or near this site, following the fall of Fort Fisher.

Continued Development of the Area

Twenty-five years after the Civil War, a pier at the base of Sugarloaf became a major area transportation link. Captain John Harper's new steamer “Wilmington” made regular stops here. The gleaming white vessel with three decks could hold 500 passengers. Some would debark and board a narrow gage, open car railway that followed Harper Avenue and provided easy access to the boardwalk and beach. Other steamer passengers continued on to Southport. Carolina Beach, settled about 1885, was incorporated in 1925 (Powell, 1968). By the 1940s, roads had improved and automobiles had become the preferred mode of transportation to Carolina and Kure Beaches.

The southern tip of New Hanover County became an island (now known as Pleasure Island) in 1929 when the US Army Corps of Engineers dredged Federal Point Cut, a canal that connects the Cape Fear River to Masonboro Sound. Renamed Snow's Cut in 1930 for Major William A. Snow, Chief Engineer for the Wilmington District, the canal is part of the Atlantic Intracoastal Waterway. The waterway, an inland passage for boats along the Atlantic coast, was built to bring ocean traffic inland, away from North Carolina's dangerous coastline.

World War II

World War II caused huge economic and social changes in the Wilmington area as industrial development and shipyards boomed. Civilian workers and military personnel poured into the area during the war years, causing Wilmington's population to quadruple. A huge, rapidly constructed shipyard began mass-producing the well-known Liberty Ships (Wilmington Today, 2004), armed cargo ships that transported all types of war supplies so important to the allied war effort.

In late 1940, construction started on Camp Davis, located about 30 miles above Wilmington. The base quickly grew, and by August of 1941 had over 20,000 personnel. Camp Davis used five remote training sites along North Carolina's southern coast for anti-aircraft gunnery and automatic weapons training. Fort Fisher became the primary firing range.

Wilmington and the New Hanover County beaches became favorite places to visit for soldiers on liberty. Many soldiers had never seen a beach or tried to live at one, so swimming lessons and beach safety were taught.

Establishment of Carolina Beach State Park

Following the suggestion of the North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development, the 1967 General Assembly created the State Parks and State Forest Study Commission. The Commission evaluated the existing state parks system and in January 1969 presented its findings and made recommendations to the next legislature regarding expansion of the system needed to provide adequate outdoor recreation opportunities. The Commission reported that a *...bold and new concept in development of state parks would be necessary to meet these needs*, and that *...a broad and realistic program for acquiring new parks and expanding existing parks* was needed (Paris, Jr., 1969). Increased state park visitation - approaching five million at that time - indicated a demand for more parks and park facilities.

The Commission recognized that the primary means of establishing state parks, gifts from private citizens and transfers of publicly owned lands, was not sufficient. From 1915 to October 1968, 84 percent of the land for state parks (19,651 of 23,380 acres) had been acquired in that manner. Only 3729 acres had been purchased (State of North Carolina, 1971).

Specific recommendations of the Commission included enlarging the system by 15 or more new areas in order to accommodate an additional 2.1 million visitors; placing new parks so that most of the state's population would be within approximately 50 miles or one hour of driving time; improving and increasing facilities in existing parks; providing an equitable location of parks across the state; encouraging advanced planning and land acquisition in areas of major water projects; adding staff for site planning and development; and insuring access to public waters.

The Commission put a top priority on the need to act quickly to acquire fast- disappearing resources and also made recommendations regarding the types of land needed. The Commission recommended acquiring the most scenic and distinctive natural resources, consistent with objectives of location and priority, and recommended emphasis on sites capable of meeting the public demand for water- oriented outdoor recreation activities such as swimming and boating. The Commission's report also ranked proposed new sites (*North Carolina State Parks for the Future*, 1969).

Following the report, the state undertook a program to expand the State Parks System in order to preserve and protect natural resources of unique, scenic value; to acquire adequate examples of such features in order to preserve them in as close to a natural state as possible; to provide recreational use in a variety of outdoor recreation surroundings; to portray and interpret plant and animal life, geology and all other natural features and processes for educational purposes; to provide access to public waters; and to preserve, protect and portray scientific sites of statewide importance (State of North Carolina, 1971).

While the ambitious proposals made by the Commission never fully materialized, some concomitant benefits to and growth in the state parks system did take place. From 1968-1970, four new parks were added, more than in any previous two-year period, bringing the total number of state parks to 17. The parks added were Pilot Mountain, Stone Mountain, Masonboro (later to be renamed Carolina Beach State Park), and Raven Rock state parks. Significant land additions to Morrow Mountain and Hanging Rock were also made (State of North Carolina, 1971). Masonboro State Park was established to preserve the unique environment along the intracoastal waterway and to allow the public to have an opportunity to enjoy the nearby beaches.

Park Land Acquisition and Development

The first land for Masonboro State Park - 290.6 acres - was purchased May 13, 1969 from James Carr, and the General Assembly appropriated \$125,000 for initial facility development. The next year, 53.3 acres were leased from the US Army and added to the park. A 38.5-acre purchase followed in January 1971. A portion of the initial land acquired for Masonboro State Park was funded by the first General Assembly appropriation for state park land acquisition since the purchase of Mount Mitchell in 1916.

In 1976, the park began to manage approximately 310 acres under a five-year lease with the Department of the Army. The leased area, part of the buffer for the Military Ocean Terminal at Sunny Point (MOTSU), continues to be operated as a part of the park with five-year renewals of the lease. The MOTSU area within the park contains limesink ponds that are some of the park's unique natural features and also contains many of the park's rare plants and animals. Sugarloaf, the relic sand dune of prehistoric and historical significance, is a part of the MOTSU lands as well. Portions of the park's trail system are located on the leased lands. Continued renewal of the lease is critical to the park's recreation use and to preservation, protection, and interpretation of the area's natural heritage.

In 1972, the State applied for and received approval from the US Department of the Interior's Bureau of Outdoor Recreation for a federal Land and Water Conservation Fund project to further develop Masonboro State Park. The 50 percent matching grant totaled \$168,288 and included dredging for and construction of a marina, campsites with water and electrical hookups, restrooms, and a park entrance and roadway (US Department of the Interior). The park's name was changed to Carolina Beach State Park in 1975. A second LWCF grant awarded in 1986 funded dredging of the marina basin and channel, replacement pilings, and dock and bulkhead repairs. In 1999, a new park visitor's center was opened that included an auditorium, administrative offices and a classroom. Exhibits that focus on the park's history and natural heritage were added in 2000.

In August of 1973, Secretary Grace Rohrer of the Department of Cultural Resources (DCR), concerned over the problems created by uncontrolled recreational use of the nearby Fort Fisher area, called a meeting with other involved state agencies. Two decisions were made: that the DCR would have management responsibility over the areas; and that the DCR and Department of Natural and Economic Resources would write a master plan to determine the area's needs and steps to manage it.

The *Fort Fisher State Historic Site Master Development Plan* was completed in 1974. It recapped the problems facing the area, assessed the site's natural resources, and recommended development priorities. The Division of Parks and Recreation began giving some limited assistance with management of the outdoor recreation use of the beach area using staff from Carolina Beach State Park. Carolina Beach State Park's management involvement at Fort Fisher increased during the 1970s and 1980s, continuing until after establishment of the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area in 1986 (Huband, 2005).

In the spring of 1989, a bill (SB 619) was introduced in the General Assembly directing the State to transfer 22.8 acres of land from Carolina Beach State Park to the Town of Carolina Beach to be used for development of a youth center. The land identified for transfer lay directly across from the park entrance and to the east of State Road 1534. The Division of Parks and Recreation and the Department of Natural Resources opposed the transfer because the proposed transfer conflicted with the State Parks Act, was in violation of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Act which

prohibited conversion of park land to other than public outdoor recreation use, set a damaging precedent, and resulted in loss of land that was important to the park. The bill never passed and the state retained the land for park purposes.

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Wilmington Today. *World War II History*. Cape Fear Images, Inc. Wilmington, N.C. 2004.
(www.wilmingtontoday.com/history/WorldWarIIMain.html)

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